

Dignity in Action

One of five main points of the NPC's Election Manifesto is the need for a legally binding Dignity Code that protects the vulnerable elderly from neglect and abuse and improves the quality and standards of care for older people. Last week over 40 groups of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) around the country were active in promoting the NPC's version of the Code that was launched and signed by MPs in the House of Commons three years ago this month. They gave out leaflets, wrote press releases, circulated petitions and staged signing ceremonies for representatives of civic authorities and healthcare services to express support. Already healthcare groups and many local authorities like Suffolk County Council follow their own similar voluntary codes of practice such as is enshrined for instance in the Suffolk Charter, but some like Suffolk and Waveney District now lend their support for a national Dignity Code to be established in law, that would uphold the rights and maintain the personal dignity of older people. All this would be within the context of ensuring the health, safety and well-being of those who are increasingly less able to care for themselves or to properly conduct their affairs.

The NPC code is based on simple respect and reasonableness and calls for:

- Respect for individuals to make up their own minds, and for their personal wishes as expressed in 'living wills', for implementation when they can no longer express themselves clearly.
- Respect for an individual's habits, values, particular cultural background and any needs, linguistic or otherwise.
- The use of formal spoken terms of address, unless invited to do otherwise.
- Comfort, consideration, inclusion, participation, stimulation and a sense of purpose in all aspects of care.
- Care to be adapted to the needs of the individual.
- Support for the individual to maintain their hygiene and personal appearance.
- Respect for people's homes, living space and privacy.
- Concerns to be dealt with thoroughly and the right to complain without fear of retribution.
- The provision of advocacy services where appropriate.

The NPC's Dignity Action Day was celebrated by the Lowestoft branch on Friday 30th January. Despite cold weather a good gathering of Suffolk Pensioners and church folk gathered for lunch joined by guests Waveney MP Peter Aldous and Waveney District Chairman Cllr. Peter Collecott. Later, the Mayor of Lowestoft, Cllr. Stephen Ardley welcomed all to the event, outlining the importance of the code, together with the Mayoress, herself a carer by profession. Chris Brooks, chairman of the Lowestoft branch of the county and regional pensioner associations gave a slideshow presentation on the code and the work of the NPC. The civic guests signed their support for the code and the occasion ended with a choral performance of WWI songs by the Waveney Singers in aid of Help for Heroes. Other important signatories pledging support for the code were representatives of HealthEast CCG, James Paget University Hospital Board of Governors and Managers of some residential care homes. A full news report of the day can be seen on www.lowestoftjournal.co.uk/news

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